

Statement of Representative James A. Leach
Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Hearing on "The U.S. and India: An Emerging Entente"
Before the House International Relations Committee
September 8, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for scheduling this timely hearing on this seminally important issue. I would like to join with my colleagues in welcoming our two distinguished Administration witnesses.

There is nothing more difficult than to attempt to put perspective on events of the day because many issues can only be understood clearly, if at all, with the passage of time. For example, if we ask what is new on the Asian landscape over the last several years there is a tendency to emphasize troubling developments: tension over Taiwan, North Korea, and the United States trade deficit. But on the positive side little is more consequential than America's deepening ties with India.

The growing warmth between our two countries has its roots in the common values and increasingly congruent interests of democratic societies committed to the ideal of liberty, social tolerance, representative government and the fight against terrorism and other transnational threats such as the spread of weapons of mass destruction, illicit narcotics, and the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Here I should add that Congress and the American people deeply appreciate the contributions from India, and so many other countries, to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Our deepening government-to-government relationship is complemented by a rich mosaic of expanding people-to-people ties. In many ways, the more than 2 million Indian Americans in the U.S. have become a living bridge between our two great democracies, bringing together our two peoples, as well as greatly enlarging the United States' understanding of India and Indian understanding of the United States.

From a Congressional perspective, it should be underscored that America's commitment to this robust and multi-faceted relationship is fully bipartisan. There is virtually no dissent in Washington from the precept that India and the U.S. should become natural allies with compelling incentives over time to develop convergent perspectives on a host of regional and global concerns.

By any objective measure, U.S.-India relations have never been on more solid footing. From new agreements on defense cooperation to expanded high technology trade and space cooperation, the relationship is moving forward in impressive fashion. On the economic front, America is India's largest trading partner and largest foreign investor. In many ways, however, what is impressive is how marginal, not how significant, is our trade. Economic and commercial ties between the U.S. and India are at an incipient, not end stage, and arguably deserve priority emphasis at this stage in our relationship.

In this context, many on Capitol Hill were caught by surprise with the Administration's offer to extend full civilian nuclear cooperation; a proposal which, as far as I am aware, was made without consultation with this Committee or the legislative branch more generally, notwithstanding the fact that implementation will require an act of Congress.

It is self-evident that for a variety of reasons the Administration was keen to reach a historic "breakthrough" agreement during the recent visit of Prime Minister Singh, and Congress would likely have been strongly supportive of several possible initiatives designed to advance this objective.

In particular, many Members on both sides of the aisle would have warmly welcomed the announcement of U.S. support for India's claim to a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

On the other hand, few, if any, Members appear to have been clamoring in these dangerous and uncertain times for the Administration to peremptorily re-write the rules of the global nonproliferation order that have well-served U.S. interests for over three decades.

To be fair, one can imagine a number of plausible rationales for this agreement: to earn trust and goodwill with policymakers in Delhi and the Indian public; to promote the use of nuclear power as an environmentally-friendly alternative to the use of increasingly scarce fossil fuels; and the promotion of an Eisenhower-style atoms-for-peace initiative.

Having said all that, and having just returned from a visit to North Korea, where the goal of U.S. policy is the elimination of the DPRK's nuclear weapons infrastructure and its return to the NPT, I regret to say that the

timing as well as the reasoning underlying this agreement appear to many on Capitol Hill as hurried and perhaps unrealistic.

Now the Administration is faced with a vexing dilemma. It has raised Indian expectations by making sensitive security commitments it cannot fulfill without legislative action by Congress. It is far from clear, however, whether Congressional support will be forthcoming and, if so, under what conditions. Expectations that have been precipitated without adequate, if any, consultation on Capitol Hill may go unmet and mutual disappointment may result.

I am open to hearing the Administration's rationale for its shift in non-proliferation policy, but the Executive Branch should be cognizant that it is hard to cement relations with any country based on promises that may not be deliverable.

The key question for Congress, after all, in this policy shift we are required to review relates less to U.S.-Indian relations and more to the role of international arms control, particularly the NPT.

In this context, it is all the more important for the Administration to re-think its position on UN Security Council reform and recognize our vested interest in welcoming India's candidacy for permanent membership.
